

THE
A G E
OF
INFIDELITY:

IN ANSWER TO
THOMAS PAINE'S
AGE OF REASON.

BY A LAYMAN.

"Wrong not the Christian, think not REASON yours :
" 'Tis REASON our great Master holds so dear,
.....
" To give lost REASON life, he pour'd his own.
" Believe, and shew the Reason of a Man ;
" Believe, and taste the Pleasure of a God ;
" Believe, and look with Triumph on the Tomb.

YOUNG.

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THE
A G E
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INFIDELITY.

IN an age like this, it is no wonder that infidelity has its champions. The genuine gospel of Christ is a system too pure and divine to meet the cordial approbation of men of vicious hearts and corrupt principles; and such have hitherto composed the majority of mankind. Nor are the friends of Christianity alarmed for its safety—
“GREAT IS THE TRUTH, AND WILL PREVAIL.”
Although deistical principles may be expected to spread among the young, the gay, and the voluptuous; yet hath truth ever gained more than it hath lost by such attacks; to them we owe the masterly defences of a Locke, an Addison, a West, and many more, in antient as well as modern times.

B

“ Sir

“ Sir ISAAC NEWTON had a very sagacious conjecture, which he told Dr. Clarke, from whom (says Mr. *Whiston**), I received it, That the overbearing tyranny and persecuting power of the antichristian party, which hath so long corrupted christianity, and enslaved the christian world, must be put a stop to, and broken to pieces, by the prevalence of INFIDELITY *for some time*, before primitive christianity could be restored; which seems to be the very means that is now working in Europe for the same good and great end of Providence. Possibly (continues Mr. W.) he might think that our Saviour’s own words implied it: *When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*—Or, possibly he might think no other way so likely to do it in human affairs; it being, I acknowledge, too sadly evident, that there is not at present religion enough in Christendom to put a stop to such antichristian tyranny and persecution, upon any genuine principles of christianity.”

So far Mr. Whiston. We have seen the event: The unhallowed hands of infidelity have pulled down idolatry and superstition with a vengeance that better men would have trembled at. I cannot express my feelings on this event better than

* Whiston on the Revelation of St. John, 4to. 2d Ed. p. 321.

in the speech (real or supposed) of a French Curé to the present National Assembly of France, on the resignation of his ecclesiastical character and salary, together with the treasures of his church*.

“ I rejoice in this day (said he) not because I wish to see religion degraded ; but because I wish to see it exalted and purified. By dissolving its alliance with the state, you have given it dignity and independence. You have done it a piece of service which its well-wishers would, perhaps, never have had courage to render it ; but which was the only thing wanted to make it appear in its genuine beauty and lustre. Nobody will now say to me, that I am performing the offices of my religion as a trade.—“ He is paid for telling the people such and such things—He is hired to keep up a useless piece of mummery.” They cannot now say this, and therefore I feel myself raised in my own esteem, and shall speak to them with a confidence and frankness, which, before this, I never durst venture to assume. We resign, without reluctance, our gold and silver images and embroidered vestments, because we have never found that gold and silver made the heart more pure, or the affections more heavenly : We can also spare our churches ; for the heart that wishes to lift up itself to God will never be at a loss for

* Morning Chron. Nov. 29, 1793.

room to do it in : but we cannot spare our *religion*, because, to tell you the truth, we never had so much occasion for it. I understand that you accuse us priests of having told the people a great many falsehoods.—I suspect this may have been the case ; but till this day we have never been allowed to enquire whether the things which we taught them were true or not. You required us formerly to receive them all without proof ; and you would have us now reject them all without discrimination : neither of these modes of conduct become philosophers, such as you would be thought to be. I am going to employ myself diligently, along with my parishioners, to sift the wheat from the bran, the true from the false : If we are not successful, we shall be at least sincere.” —Who can refrain from wishing such a man good success in the name of the Lord ?

But it is time to announce the object of this pamphlet, which I shall do in premising,

I. That I intend *no personal abuse* of Mr. Paine. Ill language is no weapon of the christian's warfare. Nor do I intend a mere attack on his pamphlet. My object is rather to provide an antidote against the growing Infidelity of the Age. I have found nothing new either in Mr. P.'s arguments, or objections, against Christianity and the Bible.

Bible. The same things have been often said with as much wit, and more plausibility.

II. I meddle not with *Politics*; and am happy that Mr. P.'s pamphlet gives no occasion. The subjects can never be kept too distinct; but as the celebrity of his writings among a numerous class of readers, will doubtless introduce his theological notions to many who perhaps never read or thought much about religion; to them I beg leave to drop one caution—not to let their admiration of his abilities in the one subject, warp their judgment on the other. A man may be an adept in one science, who in others is a mere dunce. The case often happens; and in general, perhaps, those who know most of politics, know least about religion.

III. I am the advocate of Christianity *only*.—Not of ecclesiastical establishments, religious tests, or human creeds. Neither do I plead the cause of one sect or party of christians against the others: so far as they harmonize with the bible, “Peace be unto them:”—where they disagree, away with them.—“What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD of Hosts.”

IV. I beg leave to explain what I mean by *Christianity*. I mean that system of divine and practical truth, taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and faithfully recorded in the writings
of

of the New Testament ; but which, to be of real benefit to us, must be received, not only in the head, but in the heart. True christianity is not merely theoretical ; it is vital, experimental, practical. Every thing short of this is children's play, or something worse. A Pagan, a Jew, or a Mahomedan, has less to answer for than such christians as believe only in Jesus Christ and the scriptures, as they do in Julius Cæsar, or Tacitus.

V. I have said christianity is faithfully recorded in the *scriptures*. When I say, "faithfully recorded," I mean not to give up the inspiration of the sacred writings. I believe, not only that the writers were faithful and impartial in recording facts which came within their own knowledge and observation ; but also, that they were supernaturally assisted in recording facts which otherwise they could not have ascertained—in delivering predictions of events they could not have else foreseen—and in inditing those sublime devotional pieces, which have been the basis of the religious worship both of Jews and Christians, from that time to this. Under the term *scriptures*, I include all the usual books of the Old and New Testament, exclusive of the Apocrypha.

VI. And lastly. I do not intend to compliment

ment the enemies of Revelation with a surrender of the peculiar *doctrines* and *mysteries* of christianity. I know that some are willing to give up, perhaps the best part of christianity, to secure the rest : but I believe the whole tenable. Nor do I conceive it worth any exertions to procure proselytes to such a mutilated system ; for if christianity be reduced to the standard of natural religion, and mere morality, it matters not by which denomination it is called.

These things premised, what I have farther to offer to the reader's attention will divide itself into two parts : A SKETCH OF THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY—and A REVIEW OF MR. P.'S OBJECTIONS TO IT.

SKETCH

S K E T C H
OF THE
EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

THAT there was such a person as Jesus Christ—that he was born in Judea in the time of Augustus—that he gathered disciples—taught the multitude,—performed many wonderful works, and at last suffered death through the malice of the Jews—are facts better attested than the most notorious actions of the heroes, and orators of antient Greece and Rome. For,

1st. We have the same authority for these as for those; namely, that of Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the younger, and other heathen historians of those times.

2d. We have the circumstantial narratives of the Evangelical historians, most of whom were eye-witnesses of the facts they relate, and (with a thousand others) confirmed this testimony with their blood. These writings also may be proved

not

not only to have been written, but also dispersed, and read in public assemblies of christians, during the very age in which these events happened.

3d. The principal facts (the resurrection excepted) were never denied by the early enemies of christianity, among either Jews or Heathens. It is true they attributed them to wrong causes, and endeavoured to evade the inferences naturally deducible from them—with what success we shall have occasion to observe.

4th. The very being of christianity, and the existence of its institutions, as in particular, the christian sabbath and sacraments, are incontestable monuments of the facts to which they refer. These hints may suffice to shew the credibility of the leading facts on which christianity is founded; especially as not even Mr. Paine himself denies them.

The credibility of the facts will, in a great measure, establish the authority of the writers. For if the facts which they assert upon their own knowledge, are in themselves credible, it only remains to shew that they were persons of common sense, and sincere in their testimony, to establish it so far as is necessary to our present purpose.

For the former we may appeal to the writings themselves; for assuredly, no man who does not

with his own capacity to be called in question, will venture to deny them a sufficient degree of understanding to relate the things of which they were both eye and ear witnesses. And for their sincerity we may appeal to the simplicity, harmony and candour of their narrations, to the disinterestedness of their conduct, the unwearied assiduity of their labours, and their constant and severe sufferings in the cause of their divine master. And indeed it is utterly inconceivable that such a number of men should conspire in an imposture, not only at the expence of every thing dear in this life, and in the immediate prospect of death itself; but in the apprehension of being treated as impostors by posterity, and answering for their impositions in a future world.

Having thus far established the credibility of the authors of the New Testament, we proceed to enquire into their account of the divine character and mission of Jesus Christ, which will lead us at the same time to review some of the grand evidences on which christianity is founded.

Their professed design then, is, to shew that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Saviour of mankind; that he came into the world in consequence of a divine mission, and that he fulfilled that mission in his life, doctrine, sufferings, death and resurrection.

I. In

I. In order to demonstrate this, they represent him as FORETOLD by the Hebrew PROPHETS, and as exactly answering all their sublime predictions, both in his life and death. This is an extensive subject; we can only observe a few particulars.—They pointed out the *place* of his BIRTH, namely, Bethlehem, an obscure village, but to be made illustrious by this event *; and restricted the *time* of it during the existence of the second temple, and within a period which by every reasonable mode of calculation must have expired at its destruction †.—His tribe and family are exactly marked ‡; his conception of a virgin ||, and the circumstance of his being preceded by a forerunner § (namely, John the Baptist) are foretold with equal plainness.—The very manner of his preaching, that it should be meek and affectionate; the nature of his doctrine, that it should be full of divine wisdom, and righteousness, and severe only to the hypocritical and impenitent; the miracles with which his doctrine should be confirmed, the healing the diseased, recovering the blind and deaf, and other works of kindness and benevolence ¶—The purity of his life; and,

* Micah v. 2. compared with Matt. ii. 1—6.

† Gen. xlix. 10 Haggai ii. 7. Dan. ix. 24—27.

‡ Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

|| Isaiiah vii. 14.

§ Isaiiah xl. 3.

¶ Isaiiah xlii. 1—8.

above all, the nature, degree, variety of his sufferings, his accursed death, and glorious resurrection † are described by the prophets, in terms little less particular and exact than were used by the evangelical writers, after the actual accomplishment of the events themselves.

It is further observable, that these very prophecies were, most of them, applied to the expected Messiah by Jewish doctors who preceded the time of his appearance; to these prophecies Jesus Christ himself appealed; and from them his apostles constantly reasoned with the Jews; and by this preaching, accompanied by the promised effusions of the Spirit, thousands were convinced and converted, and became the disciples to and martyrs of a crucified Messiah.

To give all conceivable strength to this evidence and cut off the only pretence that future adversaries could raise, namely, That these predictions were forged subsequent to the events, the providence of God had so ordered it, that they were not only translated into Chaldea, but into Greek; whence many particulars became known to the Gentile philosophers, were interwoven with the sibylline oracles, and even incorporated into the sublime numbers of Virgil; and all this before the New Testament was written. Thus

† Isaiah lii. 13 -- 15. liii.

a general expectation was formed at this time of a great deliverer, and the eyes of all men directed to look for his appearance.

“ O, son of mighty Jove! from heaven appear;
 “ Come to thine honors—lo, the time draws near!
 “ The barren hills proclaim the Deity;
 “ A God! a God! the vocal rocks reply *.”

II. Let us review the Redeemer's MORAL CHARACTER. Take a summary of it in the language of the elegant but sceptical Rousseau †.

“ I will confess to you, that the majesty of the scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers with all their pomp of diction: how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the scripture! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast, or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manners! what an affecting grace-

* Virgil's Pollio, compared with Mr. Popes Messiah and judicious Notes.

† See his Letter to the Archbishop of Paris, Eng. Transf. London 1763, 12mo. p. 63.

fulness in his delivery ! What sublimity in his maxims ! What profound wisdom in his discourses ! What presence of mind, what subtlety, what truth in his replies ! How great the command over his passions ! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die, without weakness, and without ostentation ?—When *Plato* described his imaginary good man with all the shame of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ : the resemblance was so striking that all the [christian] fathers perceived it.

“ What prepossession, what blindness must it be, to compare [Socrates] the son of Sophroniscus to [Jesus] the son of Mary ! What an infinite disproportion is there between them ? Socrates, dying without pains or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last ; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Socrates, with all his wisdom, was any thing more than a vain sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others however, had before put them in practice ; he had only to say therefore what they had done, and to reduce their examples to precept.—But where could *Jesus* learn, among his competitors, that pure and sublime morality,
of

of which he only hath given us both precept and example?—The death of Socrates, peaceably philosophizing with his friends, appears the most agreeable that could be wished for; that of Jesus, expiring in the midst of agonizing pains, abused, insulted, and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that could be feared. Socrates in receiving the cup of poison, blessed the weeping executioner who administered it; but Jesus, in the midst of excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes! if the life and death of Socrates were those of a Sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God. Shall we suppose the evangelic history a mere fiction? Indeed my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction; on the contrary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty, without obviating it: it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such an history, than that one only should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained in the gospel, the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero."

III. Let

III. Let us consider the doctrines and precepts which form the substance of our Lord's Discourses. We have already seen the concessions of a free-thinker. We may add, that both his doctrines and precepts had infinitely the advantage of the greatest sages in the schools of heathen philosophers, in several respects.

As to the *doctrines*, they were clear and express, not clothed in the ambiguity of the schools; they were worthy the nature of God, and important to mankind; instead of the shameful inventions of the poets, or the idle enquiries of the different philosophic sects; they point out the perfections of Deity—the miseries of our own state, and a way of acceptance with God here, and admission into the beatific vision hereafter.—They discover the nature and importance of the Redeemer's character as mediator between God and man.—They are expressed with the greatest certainty, and confirmed with the fullest evidence: “God is gracious to sinners: I who came from the bosom of the Father declare it.—Man's heart is corrupted; I who reveal men's thoughts assert it.—There is a future state of rewards and punishments, I who now raise the dead, and am appointed to judge the world, aver it.”

The *morality* of the gospel has equally the advantage of the heathen ethics, particularly in two respects:

respects :—It is *universal*. Scarce a philosopher can be referred to, however severe in his manners, who had not some favorite vice to excuse or palliate; and scarce a sin so abominable, but it had some philosopher for its apologist. But what sin did Jesus tolerate?—Again, the *motives* he used were infinitely better adapted to the state of human nature, than those of Gentile moralists. They address our *fear*; God is just, and will punish impenitent sinners :—our *hope*; God is gracious, and will reward those that fear him :—our *gratitude*; God hath loved the world, and given his Son to save it :—our *interest*; he gives “an hundred fold in this life, and, in the world to come, life everlasting *.”

It may not be impertinent here to add, what Jesus taught in relation to the Old Testament œconomy, and its relation to the gospel dispensation. So far from speaking contemptuously of Moses and the prophets, as some deistical writers have pretended, he constantly refers to their writings as divine, and appeals to them as witnesses of his mission. “Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me †.”

IV. The *miracles* of Jesus Christ command our

* Mark x. 39.

† John v. 39.

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attention ;

attention; particularly, as they were wrought in confirmation of his doctrine and mission. “A *miracle* (says Dr. Clarke) is a work effected in a manner different from the common and regular course of Providence, by the interposition either of God himself, or some intelligent agent, superior to man *.”

The miracles of Jesus were frequent, numerous, instantaneous, public, lasting, benevolent, and such as evidently required the interposition of Omnipotence. He healed the incurably sick; gave sight to those born blind; recovered demoniacs, lunatics, and epileptics: he raised the dead from their graves by his word; and performed many other works equally astonishing. It also particularly merits our attention, that he performed these wonderful works in his own name, and constantly appealed to them as evidences of his character and authority.

What said the Jews to this? “He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils.” Is this rational? Is Satan a stranger to his own interests? Or would infernal spirits employ their powers in works of benevolence to men?—or to establish the brightest system of divinity, and the purest morals that ever were delivered?

* Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, p. 219.

What say the descendants of those Jews at this day? That Jesus found the ineffable name, JEHOVAH, in the temple, where it had been secreted for ages, and that by virtue of this charm he was able to perform all his miracles, and might have wrought yet more. But will common sense listen to such an idle tale? Or why was it not told sooner? *Credat Judæus Appellæ!*

What said the heathen philosophers? What said those grand enemies of primitive christianity, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian? They pretended that Jesus Christ was a magician and a juggler—that Vespasian, Apollonius Tyanneus, and other prophets of their own, wrought the like. But what a croud of unanswerable queries force themselves upon us?—What is Magic? If it be a diabolical art, devils would never have interested themselves to promote such a cause: if Magic be a cheat only, it never could have produced such effects. What were the heathen miracles? If false, how can they affect the truth of Christ's miracles? And if true, how can they be compared with them? For a prince like Vespasian to be flattered by his courtiers, or a philosopher like Apollonius, by his scholars, are neither new nor strange events. But shall their few, obscure and suspicious wonders, be compared with the miracles of Jesus Christ? No man dare openly main-

tain it. Beside there is very good reason to believe these stories were forged afterwards in prejudice of christianity.

But if miracles are to be attributed to magical arts and diabolical agency, it requires no great sagacity to decide which ought rather to be attributed thereto, those wrought in support of idolatry and superstition; or those wrought in express opposition to those arts and follies, and in support of the pure doctrines and morality of the gospel. Indeed the cause in support of which they are wrought, is a material circumstance in the test of miracles. The Jews were forbid to follow the prophet who enticed them to idolatry, whatever wonders he might perform*.

But there are two circumstances which set the miracles of Jesus far above competition even with those of Moses himself. The one is that they were wrought in exact fulfilment of antient predictions, in which the very nature and circumstances of them (far different from those of the Jewish lawgiver) are pointed out to mark the character of the Messiah. The other still more extraordinary circumstance is, that the very persons who witnessed the miracles of Christ were able to do the same, or even greater, in his name, and ac-

* Deut. xiii. 1---5.

tually did them to confirm their evidence; nay, still farther, they had delegated to them the authority of conferring the same miraculous powers on others, by imposition of hands; and this power was continued for many years to the utter confusion of their adversaries, and the destruction of Paganism. It was in vain to dispute with men, who could appeal to a surrounding throng of blind, diseased, and lame, who had been healed by a word spoken in the name of Jesus—with men who spoke all languages by inspiration, and had the wonderful ability of communicating these gifts to others.

V. These observations lead our attention to two particular facts on which christianity is, in a great measure, founded. I mean the RESURRECTION of CHRIST, and the DESCENT of the HOLY SPIRIT already hinted at.

The former of these is of indisputable importance: “If Christ be not raised our faith is vain.” This is related by the very persons who used to converse with him during his public ministry, and who saw him repeatedly after he was raised from the dead, conversed with him, and received a commission from him to publish this fact, and proselyte all nations to these principles.—This is confirmed in some measure by the suspicious story of his enemies, that his disciples stole

stole his body while the guard they had placed to watch the sepulchre slept *. But how dare the guard to sleep at the hazard of their lives? and if they did, how did they know who stole his body? and if they did not sleep, how was it possible that a few unarmed fishermen should force a military guard?

But the grand evidence of Christ's resurrection, and indeed of the truth of christianity, is the DESCENT of the HOLY SPIRIT on the day of Pentecost. Our Lord had promised this previous to his death †, and the accomplishment of it was the strongest evidence possible, both of Christ's resurrection, and the divine origin of christianity.

VI. Once more, let us consider the EFFECTS and consequences of this effusion of the HOLY SPIRIT. They are principally three.

1. The rapid and universal spread of the gospel, even "before the destruction of Jerusalem (Bishop Newton observes ‡) the gospel was not only preached in the lesser Asia, and Greece and Italy; the great theatres of action then in the world; but was likewise propagated as far northward as Ethiopia, as far eastward as Parthia and India, as far westward as Spain and Britain." And in the following century, notwithstanding all the oppo-

* Matt. xxviii. 11---14. † John xiv. 16, &c.

‡ On the Prophecies, vol. ii. p. 237.

sition and persecution it met with, Tertullian* boldly tells the Roman government—"We are but of yesterday, and by to-day are grown up, and overspread your empire; your cities, your islands, your forts, towns, assemblies, and your very camps, wards, companies, palace, senate, forum, all swarm with christians. Your temples indeed we leave to yourselves, and they are the only places you can name without christians."

2. It is to be observed, that christianity not only proselyted men to the belief and outward profession of christianity, but had a visible and moral effect on their lives and conduct. Never was any other cause supported with such irresistible evidence. Wherever it came it was received by multitudes, at the expence of their property, characters and lives: many of these who had hitherto lived debauched, impious and idolatrous lives, became now sober, temperate, honest, and religious. This was not indeed universally the case, because all were not sincere in their profession; but it was so, to an extent that no other religion could boast. Nay the Pagan religion generally made men morally worse, in proportion to the zeal with which they professed it.

3. The remaining effect of the spirits effusion was the constancy and readiness with which men

* Apology, ch. 38. Reeve's Tr. vol. i. 299.

suffered

suffered the loss of all things, and even martyrdom itself in its most terrible forms.

—“ I cannot omit (says Mr. Addison*) that which appears to me a standing miracle in the three first centuries, I mean that amazing and supernatural courage or patience, which was shewn by innumerable multitudes of martyrs in those slow and painful torments which were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair at Lyons, and the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a grate of Iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite suffering of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion or blaspheme his Saviour.—Such trials seems to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unbiassed in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered itself out of such dreadful distress by any means that could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine that many persons in so good a cause might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block; but to expire leisurely among the most exquisite

* Evidences of the Christian Religion, Sect. vii.

tortures, when they might come out of them, even by a mental reservation, or an hypocrisy which was not without a possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer."

"It is certain, that the deaths and sufferings of the primitive christians had a great share in the conversion of these learned Pagans, who lived in the ages of persecution, which with some intervals and abatements, lasted near 300 years after our Saviour. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and others, tell us, that this first of all alarmed their curiosity, roused their attention and made them seriously inquisitive into the nature of that religion, which could endue the mind with so much strength, and overcome the fear of death, nay, raise an earnest desire of it, though it appeared in all its terrors. This they found had not been effected by all the doctrines of those philosophers, whom they had thoroughly studied, and who had been labouring at this great point. The sight of these dying and tormented martyrs engaged them to search into the history and doctrines of him for whom they suffered. The more they searched, the more they were convinced; till their conviction grew so strong, that

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they

they themselves embraced the same truths, and either actually laid down their lives, or were always in a readiness to do it, rather than depart from them."

I might add, though this fact is most remarkable in the three first centuries, it was not confined to them. The same constancy is observable in those that suffered for the same faith under the popish and other persecutions. God forbid that there should be occasion for any more *such* demonstrations of the power of divine grace and truth!

I have now finished the proposed sketch of the evidences of christianity, which I hope the sceptic reader has had the patience to peruse with some attention, as I consider a connected view of them but just and necessary to form an estimate of its truth.

A REVIEW
OF MR. PAINE'S
OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIANITY.

To follow Mr. P. through all his desultory observations would much exceed the limits of this pamphlet; but I shall endeavour to reduce what is most material and pertinent to the subject under three classes; *Objections against ANY Revelation—against the CHRISTIAN Revelation—and against* “the three principal means employed (as he says) to impose upon mankind;” viz. MYSTERY, MIRACLE, and PROPHECY.

We begin with,

I. Mr. P's objections against ANY Revelation. “Revelation (says he) when applied to religion, means something communicated *immediately* from God to man. No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication if he pleases. But admitting, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other per-

son, it is revelation to that person only. When he tells it to a second person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revelation to all those persons. It is a revelation to the first person only, and *hearsay* to every other; and consequently, they are not obliged to believe it.*” The whole of this reasoning depends upon the impertinent word “*immediately*,” which Mr. P. has marked in Italics, to shew its importance. Certainly, if revelation means something *immediately* communicated from God, then must it be limited to the first or *immediate* communication. But may I not reveal a truth to a third person, through the medium of a second of such established veracity, as to demand belief? Is this possible with men, and impossible with God? Surely no one will assert it. It is no more essential to a divine Revelation that it be *immediate*, than that it be in a voice of thunder, or with the sound of a trumpet.

An established character for integrity always challenges credit, unless the assertion to which our assent is required, be in itself absurd, and very improbable. I am well persuaded that if the narratives by which Mr. Bruce provoked the incredulity of mankind had been related by Mr. How-

ard, Infidelity would have blushed at denying them.

But let us examine the case stated to illustrate this position. "When Moses told the children of Israel that he had received the two tables of the commandments from the hand of God, they were not obliged to believe him, because they had no other authority for it than his telling them so, the commandments carrying no internal evidence of divinity with them*."—Let us state another case parallel to this.

When an ambassador is sent from a foreign prince to our court, offering terms of amity and friendship, we are not obliged to believe his master sent him, merely because he tells us so; nor is there any thing in the message itself but what he might be capable of inventing; how then is he to ensure credit?—*By his credentials.*

The credentials of Moses were the miraculous powers with which he was endowed, and of which the Israelites had been repeatedly eye-witnesses.

As to the succeeding prophets, they never required implicit credit, till such time as their prophetic characters were sufficiently established to demand it, either by the performance of some miracle, or the accomplishment of some clear

and unequivocal prediction*. The apostles, when they challenged public confidence, healed the sick, raised the dead, and spake all languages by intuition.

The scripture revelation then, is the discovery of divine truth through the medium of persons evidently inspired and employed by the Deity.

To compare the propagation of Mohammed's system with that of Judaism or Christianity, is weak and unjust in the extreme. Mohammed wrought no miracles, delivered no predictions; but on the contrary founded his dominion on the sword. There is therefore no comparison.

II. Let us now consider Mr. Paine's most considerable objections against the CHRISTIAN revelation. Of this, however, I consider the Old Testament as an essential part†; for Mr. P. is perfectly right in asserting that Jesus Christ did not come "to establish a new religion ‡:"—"That he founded no new system§." The New Testament is only a fuller and clearer revelation of what was taught in the Old. Judaism and Christianity are so connected, that they must stand or fall together.

We shall therefore begin where Mr. P. begins,

* 1 Sam. iii. 19, 20.

† Age of Reas. p. 16.

‡ See above, p. 17.

§ Page 17.

and

and trace his objections through both Testaments; but as he is particularly bitter against divines and expositors, I shall trouble him with neither. The Scriptures alone shall be our text, and Common Sense our commentator.

“As to the account of the CREATION, (says our author) with which the book of Genesis opens, it has all the appearance of being a tradition which the Israelites had among them before they came into Egypt*.” Supposing the account to have been originally traditionary, this will not prove it false. It is reasonable to believe that, before the invention of writing, traditions were preserved with greater care; and the longevity of the Patriarchs was peculiarly favourable to this. Adam might converse with Lamech—Lamech with Shem—Shem with Abraham, or perhaps, Isaac—and another generation would be sufficient to hand down a tradition to the time of Moses. If we trace back the tradition however as far as Adam, still it must have come to him by revelation. But as Moses enjoyed so intimate communion with the Deity, and was favoured with so plenary communications from him, it is most reasonable to suppose, that he received the substance of this account from Heaven, during his residence for forty days upon the mount.

But the stile of this account is also, it seems, particularly exceptionable. "It begins abruptly. It is nobody that speaks. It is nobody that hears. It is addressed to nobody. It has neither first, second, nor third person.—It has no voucher*." The celebrated *Longinus*, however, in his Treatise of the sublime, judged differently. Speaking of the Jewish Lawgiver, he calls him "an extraordinary man, who conceived and spake worthily of the power of God, when he writes in the beginning of his laws, *God spake—what? Let there be light, and there was light.—Let there be earth; and it was so.*"—Let the reader form his own judgment. I can conceive nothing more worthy of the Supreme than speaking worlds into existence. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." To exhibit the beauty of Moses's cosmogony to the best advantage, it should be compared with the wretched and unintelligible reveries of the heathen philosophers†. Compared with them, he is as light to chaos.

But let us pass on.—"Though it is not a direct article of the christian system, that this world that we inhabit is the whole of the habitable creation yet it is so worked up therewith, from what is called

* Ib.

† See *Grotius de verit.—Stillingfleet's Orig. Sac.—and Cumberland's Sanchoniatho.*

the Mosaic account of the creation, that to believe otherwise, renders the christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous."—Here are more mistakes than one.

Had the scriptures asserted ours to be the only habitable world, I know not any proper evidence we could have opposed to that assertion; and I do not think human conjecture ought to be placed in competition with their authority. I know it has been commonly supposed that the Mosaic creation includes the whole universe; but I conceive it extends no further than what we call the solar system. We have business with no more; and the scriptures were not written to gratify idle curiosity. Let us, however, review the account, as we have it in the first chapter of Genesis.

The first state in which our world existed was that of a chaos of various elements. The first work of divine power upon it, placed it in a state of commotion, or rather fermentation. From this the almighty *fiat* produced light, and by the separation of this from darkness effected the first revolution of our sphere from west to east, and marked the period of a natural day, beginning with the evening.—On the second day a *firment*, expanse, or atmosphere was formed, and became the agent for separating the waters which covered the earth from those intended to float on

F high

high.—On the third day the earth was formed into cavities and eminences: the former held the waters, and the latter became fertile, and were crowned with vegetables.—On the fourth day were formed other spheres connected with ours:—"the sun, the moon, and the stars;" that is, as I conceive, the planets and satellites of our system.—The fifth day produced all the original species of animals, except man.—The sixth day was devoted to the formation of our first parents, and God having ended his work "BY the seventh day*," on that rested; not because he was weary, but that man, who is an imitative creature might follow his example. And this sabbath, I have no doubt but Adam observed in innocence and happiness; though perhaps no other.

This I take to be the simple narrative of Moses, compressed and a little modernized. Now in what particular, give me leave to ask, does this contradict the latest discoveries of philosophy and astronomy? Say you, that besides our system, there are innumerable others of equal magnitude in the universe? Suppose (if you please) the fixed stars to be all suns, around which revolve an infinite variety of planets.—Where do the scriptures contradict it? But, says Mr. P. this "renders the

* So chap. II. should be rendered, or to that effect.

christian system at once little and ridiculous.”—
 GOD *of innumerable worlds!* how doth thy greatness
 aggrandize thy mercy and benevolence!—As Mr.
 P. has favoured us with part of one psalm, I will
 venture to insert part of another, which at the
 same time may give the reader some idea of the
 nature of Hebrew poetry. It seems to have been
 an evening hymn for the time of vintage.

PSALM VIII.

“JEHOVAH our Lord! how excellent is thy name in all
 “the earth!

“Who hast displayed thy glorious majesty above the Hea-
 “vens!

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,

“The moon and stars which thou hast ordained,

“What is mortal man that thou rememberest him?

“Or the son of man that thou dost visit him?

“For thou hast made him (but) a little inferior to the an-
 “gels;

“And hast crowned him with glory and honour.

“JEHOVAH, our Lord! how excellent is thy name in all the
 “earth!”

But if we admit a plurality of worlds, “From
 whence then could arise the solitary and strange
 conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of
 worlds equally dependant on his protection,
 should quit the care of all the rest, and come to

die in our world, because they say, one man and one woman had eaten an apple. And, on the other hand, are we to suppose that every world in the boundless creation had an Eve, an apple, a serpent, and a Redeemer? In this case, the person who is irreverently called the Son of God, would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world, in an endless succession of death, with scarcely a momentary interval of life *!"— Here is Don Quixote and his windmill, with a witness! Who ever formed one of these "strange conceits" before Mr. P.? What christian ever supposed the Deity confines his care to this world only? Who ever imagined Jesus Christ to have suffered in other worlds? or, that they were guilty and needed a Redeemer?—No: we hope and believe that all other habitable worlds, if there are other, are the residence of holy and happy beings, which therefore need no redemption. And consequently, we hope, that though the number of unhappy creatures rendered miserable by sin both here and hereafter, may be very considerable in itself, yet that it may bear a very small proportion to the infinitude of holy and happy beings the Almighty has created.

We now proceed to the next incredible history of the Old Testament, viz. The FALL. Here

Deists triumph; and even many of the friends of Revelation, esteeming the literal sense indefensible, have turned the whole into an allegory on the origin of evil. This appears to me dangerous and unnecessary. Dangerous, because if we begin to allegorize plain narration, we know not where to stop:—unnecessary, because, if we admit man to be fallen, (and that appears to me unquestionable) I can conceive nothing more probable, or more rational than this account—Let us hear it.

When God had created our first parents, he placed them in the most delightful part of the globe, and called it Paradise. Here their employment was to dress the garden, and their food its fruits. That Adam was endued with considerable natural knowledge appears from the original names he bestowed on his domestics—the animal creation*. In addition to this he was favoured with the sublimest communion with the Deity of which flesh and blood seems capable†. Here every thing conspired to make him happy, except a single instance of restraint upon his appetite as a test of his obedience:—he was not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and this on pain of losing both his happiness and life. He ate and died. Say not, it was hard to die for

* Gen. ii. 20.

† See Gen. ii. 8---10.

tasting

tasting fruit : the smaller the circumstance, the less the temptation, the easier obedience, and the more aggravated the transgression.

As to the fruit itself, Mr. P. calls it "an apple." He might as well have said it was a pear, an orange, or a bunch of grapes. Moses is silent, and I suppose, for this reason, that it was a fruit, of which no child of Adam ever tasted, for it grew in paradise where none of his children ever entered. But, whatever was the fruit, it seems to have possessed very pernicious qualities; perhaps intoxicating and poisonous; for it immediately produced irregular sensations, and the shame which follows them; in fact, to borrow Milton's language, It

"Brought death into the world, and all our woe."

Mr. P. (as others have done before) much diverts himself with the Jewish system of pneumatology and doctrine of dæmons, and that, as usual, without appearing to understand them. The following scheme is the result of enquiry and reflection, and will, I hope, stand the test of critical examination.

The antient Hebrews believed, partly on the authority of scripture, and partly from tradition, the existence of innumerable spiritual beings, called *angels*, that is, agents, messengers, or servants

vants of the great Supreme. Prior to the existence of man, they believed a part of these angels to have fallen from their integrity through pride and vain glory, and become devils, at the head of whom they place Satan, originally, as they suppose, a mighty archangel. At the head of the elect and holy angels they place Michael (whom the christians explain of the Son of God) and believe that JEHOVAH governs the moral world by the intermediate ministry of these spiritual existences. To them they attribute various events, calamitous as well as happy : particularly storms, pestilence and sudden death. They also introduce the agency of evil spirits, whose dispositions incline them to mischief, and who are permitted to exert their power and malice, so far as comports with the plan and designs of Providence ; but the Almighty controuls these just as he does the raging billows—" Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

To these evil angels they attribute also the infliction of diseases of all kinds, particularly epilepsy and lunacy, which in many cases they considered as possession. Nor does this contradict the notion that evil spirits are in a state of punishment. The hell of a spirit is guilt, anxiety, terrors, and despair : and whatever gratification
such

such beings may be supposed to find in doing evil, must have more in it of pain than pleasure, and rather increase than alleviate their misery: so that there is no need of Mr. P's device of shutting them down in a pit with a hill over it.

Mr. P. is particularly offended with what he calls the "omnipresence" of the devil; which notion, like many others he combats with, is of his own invention. The fact is, that the Hebrews often attribute to Satan individually the mischiefs of a whole legion, just as we refer to a commander in chief the various actions of a campaign, in many of which he could personally have no concern.

Now if the reader sees any thing laughable in this system, whether true or false, let him indulge his levity; only let him know what it is he laughs at. For my part, I am not ashamed to own that I believe it, and if I am wrong have at least the happiness to err in company with the immortal *Milton**, the philosophic *Baxter*†, and other writers of equal celebrity.

But to return to the history of the fall. One of these depraved spirits, Satan we will suppose, plotted the ruin of our first parents, and the Almighty, for wiser and better ends than we

* See *Parad. Lost*.

† *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*.

may

may be aware of, saw fit to permit it. No doubt had Satan possessed the sagacity of some of his modern apologists, he might have formed some deeper plan; his, however, such as it was, but too well succeeded. He enters the most sagacious of all animals, inspires him with reason, at least with sophistry, draws in the woman first as the weaker vessel, and then I suppose, it is no great wonder that she drew in her husband.

But what most provokes the risibility of some persons is the devil's choice of a *serpent* for his agent. They think it the most unlikely creature in the world to be a tempter, and perhaps that might be the very reason which determined the choice of our grand enemy: for I believe it will be granted that we suffer most from temptations, where we least suspect them. There is, however, strong reason to believe that the serpent was originally a much more amiable creature than at present—that it went in some measure erect—that it inhabited the trees, and lived, like man, upon its fruits*:—and if it had no power of imitating speech, there was still the more reason to insinuate (as Milton makes him†) that this capacity was the consequence of tasting the forbidden fruit.

* See Gen. iii. 14

† Par. Lost, Book ix.

Having obviated some of the terribly ridiculous circumstances of this story, I must leave the rest on the credit of the historian. If the reader continues dissatisfied, let him try if he can find or invent any more rational hypothesis to account for the introduction of moral evil into our world.

I know that some attempts have been made to rob Moses of the honour of writing the Pentateuch, and to give it to some unknown hand; but they have been so weak, and answered so ably, that I shall still venture to attribute these books to the Hebrew legislator; especially as the contrary, if proved, would not materially affect our cause.

I have already pointed out the credentials of Moses, namely, the miracles he wrought, both in the presence of the Egyptians and before all Israel. But they had, if possible, yet stronger proofs of his divine mission. They saw him enter the thick cloud where the divine presence was terribly manifested; they saw him descend after forty days residence, where they did not think it possible he could have survived; they saw his countenance so irradiated with glory, that they could not steadfastly behold it without a veil; nay farther, they heard the same words which he brought to them on tables of stone, denounced from Heaven in a voice

voice that nothing on earth could imitate*. So far is it from true, as Mr. P. pretends, that "they had no other authority for believing their law came from heaven, than his telling them so †."

Still however, our author will insist, that though the ten commandments "contain some good moral precepts," yet do they carry "no internal evidence of divinity with them:" on the contrary, he is confident that one clause, that of "visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children," is "contrary to every principle of moral justice ‡." The fact, however, is indisputable, that both blessings and calamities are often entailed from one generation to another, and that in private families as well as nations; if Mr. P. can account for the fact upon his principles, we shall not find it hard to account for the threatening upon ours.

But the whole difficulty may be cleared up by one observation, namely, that it is only when children copy and improve on the crimes of their wicked parents, that they draw down upon their own heads redoubled vengeance: so that the innocent never suffer for the guilty, except in such temporal calamities as necessarily result from their parents crimes: as when the profligacy of one ge-

* Ex. xx. 18--22.

† Page 4.

‡ Ibid. Note.

neration involves the next in poverty, or the like. On the contrary, so benevolent is the God of Israel, that the eminent piety of one man is sometimes rewarded with blessings on thousands of his descendants; as was the case with Abraham and his children. This is the God whom deists represent as cruel and vindictive!

With respect to the rest of the Old Testament history, I shall only drop a few general hints, and leave them to the reader's reflection to enlarge and improve.

I. It is unquestionably the most ancient history in the world; and gives the only account of the earliest ages which has the least pretensions to probability.

II. The most ancient historic monuments in the world harmonize with scripture in the most material facts, and where they disagree have much less claim to credit.

III. The candid manner in which the sacred writers, as Moses, David, &c. record their own faults, and the crimes of their own nation, is a strong internal evidence in their favour, such as no other ancient historian can pretend to.

IV. There are a great number of incidental matters to be found in these books, relating to geography, natural history, the progress of the
arts,

arts, &c. which would make the inventor of the Bible a prodigy of genius and learning, not to be equalled in ancient or modern times.

V. The Jews were rather incredulous than otherwise, to their own prophets, and strongly biassed in favour of the idolatry of other nations. So that in all ages there were a number of persons who would have willingly discovered, or encouraged any discovery of imposition.

VI. The moral character of that nation was by no means so uniformly bad as Voltaire and some other writers of the same stamp have pretended. In some ages their morals were much purer, and their piety proportionably more fervent than in others. Such was the generation which first entered Canaan with Joshua.

VII. The sacred writers, like other historians, are answerable only for facts, not for their morality. If the Jewish history is stained with blood and cruelty, so is that of all other nations, and without the advantage of being relieved by such histories of piety and virtue as abound in scripture.

VIII. Though many of the events of sacred history are strange and miraculous, yet the occasion of them is generally great and becoming. Many of the circumstances seem, indeed, at this distance of time, unaccountable, and are perhaps
greatly

greatly misunderstood; partly through the conciseness of the sacred records, and partly through the fruitful comments of learned and unlearned annotators. This is perhaps particularly the case with some particulars in the History of Sampson, at which Mr. P. so pleasantly sneers.

There is one little history, however, that of Jonah, with which he is so prophanelly merry, that I cannot help remarking it, especially as he admits the story to be at least possible; for he owns, that the whale was "large enough" to swallow Jonah, though he thinks it would have been better to have reversed the story, and made Jonah swallow the whale, as it would certainly afford more ample room for merriment*. To such a miserable shift are the enemies of revelation reduced, that they are obliged to alter and reverse the sacred records to find room for ridicule and censure; and yet these men are ever complaining of the absurdities of revelation!

The other parts of the Old Testament are either devotional, moral, or prophetic. In the former class the book of Psalms is particularly conspicuous, and has often excited the admiration of persons, who paid little regard to almost any other book of the Hebrew code. Here, however, Mr.

* P. 52.

P. can recollect but one psalm, which he thinks any way worth commendation, and which he esteems a "true deistical" composition, but is certainly very unlucky in fixing on the nineteenth, since the one-half of that is expressly composed in commendation of the scriptures: "The law of the Lord is perfect---the statutes of the Lord are right," &c. The only excuse I can make for him is, that he *keeps no Bible*, as himself confesses†, and knew nothing of the psalm but from Mr. Addison's version, which is only of the former part. Indeed, the best apology I can make for many things in Mr. P. is his ignorance of the Bible; and yet what apology can we make for a man who writes against a book he knows little or nothing of?

As to the *prophets*, here our champion of infidelity lays "the ax at once to the root" of revelation by demonstrating that the term *prophet* meant originally a poet or musician; which he does most irrefragably from the following striking text—"An evil spirit of God came upon Saul and he prophesied!"—that is, says our author, "he performed his part badly," as a "musician or poet." Here is certainly demonstration; but if any reader should enquire from what book is this quotation taken? I reply from the book of

† P. 25.

—*Thomas Paine* †, whose, and whose only, is both the text and comment: so that there is the greatest propriety in the triumphant note he subjoins in the margin---“divines and commentators are very fond of puzzling one another. . . . I keep to my text!”

With submission to so great authority, I beg leave to say, that having examined every text in which this term has been supposed to signify poet or musician (for the notion is not new, though the proof is) I am convinced, and would my limits admit of it, should endeavour to convince the reader, that, however connected or introduced, the term *prophet*, in every instance, includes the idea of inspiration, real or pretended; so that when it is applied to a musician or a poet, it always means an inspired one.

It would be a painful task to run over all the abuses Mr. P. bestows on the sacred writings, in calling them “trash—paltry and contemptible tales—obscene stories,” &c. &c. which language can only shew that an author is angry, and obliged to substitute words for arguments.

We now close the Bible, in Mr. P.’s sense of that term, who restricts it to the Old Testament, as distinguished from the New.—Let us open the New Testament. The *new* Testament! (says Mr.

† P. 14.

P.) that

P.) that is, the *new* Will, as if there could be two wills of the Creator †."

I believe it is pretty well agreed that the Greek term rendered *Testament*, being ambiguous, would have been better rendered *Covenant*. Supposing, however, Testament to be the proper import of the term, where is the absurdity of two Testaments? The *Old* Testament was that of God in his antient character, as God of Israel; the *New* is that of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Mediator.

We cannot attend to all the mistakes and absurdities of "The Age of Reason:" a few of the most prominent must be selected. The first circumstance on which I shall animadvert, is that, "whale of a miracle," as Mr. P. calls it, "the Devil flying away with Jesus Christ ‡." Mr. P. however, commits another mistake in saying this is related in the New Testament, for I can find nothing like it in either of the evangelists, nor any thing upon the subject that a wise man need be ashamed of believing.

The evangelic history is simply this §; that after Jesus Christ had spent forty days in prayer and fasting in the desert, preparatory to his public work, Satan, who had deceived our first Parents,

† P. 16.

‡ P. 52.

§ See Mat. iv.

appeared to him, not with a long tail and a cloven foot, but probably, as an angel of light, sent to attend him, and insinuated in different situations, the three grand temptations, he has found so successful among mankind—despair, presumption, and ambition.

The proper scene for the first of these temptations was the desert. Jesus was an hungred, and that situation affording no food, the tempter suggests the necessity of working a miracle to procure some; insinuating at the same time that his forlorn situation afforded ground to doubt of his divine character. This repelled, he takes our Lord, not flying through the air, but doubtless, by the proper way of the stairs to the highest part of the temple, from whence the valley below appeared stupendiously deep; in this dizzy situation the tempter persuaded to cast himself down, insinuating, if I mistake not that he was commissioned as a guardian angel to secure him from danger by the fall—"he hath given his angels charge to keep thee." In the last instance, he conducts the Redeemer to the highest mountain in the neighbourhood, which presented a scene of terrestrial grandeur. Mr. *Mandrell* was, as he supposed on the very mountain, and describes it as exceeding high, and steep, and commanding an extensive and delightful view of the mountains of Arabia, the dead
sea,

sea, and the plains of Jericho. St. Matthew says, the devil from this mountain shewed our Lord "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," from whence it has been concluded that, being "the prince of the power of the air †," he formed an aerial horizon around the mountain, in which he exhibited a grand display of royalty and magnificence. But as the Jews used the terms "kingdoms" and "world" in a very contracted sense ‡, I am not certain any thing more is intended than might be seen without a miracle.

Passing all inferior objects, we now come to the two most important facts on which christianity is founded---the *death* and *resurrection* of Jesus Christ. The first of these is, indeed, admitted, but in terms that throw reproach upon his sacred character.

After asserting that Jesus Christ was "not more than eighteen months" a preacher, and that during the latter part of this time he kept himself as private as possible, and lived "concealed".--Mr. P. adds, "the idea of his concealment not only agrees very ill with his reputed divinity, but associates with it something of *puffillanimity*; and his being betrayed, or in other words, his being apprehended on the information of one of his followers,

† Ephes. ii. 2.

‡ See Gen. xxxvii. 31.---Matt. ii. 1.---John xii. 19, &c.

shews that he did not intend to be apprehended, and consequently that he did not intend to be crucified †.”

The time of our Lord's ministry is usually, and I believe justly, reckoned to be three years and an half, during which he preached and wrought miracles in the most public manner: during this period also he repeatedly foretold both his death and the manner of it, and that it was the great end of his coming into the world ‡. As the time drew nearer, he declared its approach §, surrendered to the first enquiry of the officers ||, forbade his disciples to make any attempt of rescue, ¶ and himself never offered to escape—now if all these circumstances do not amount to a sufficient proof that the Saviour of men suffered voluntarily, I know not what can, and yet all these are related by the evangelists, and there can be nothing opposed to them but mere unwarranted assertion.

But the grand attack is upon the *resurrection*. “The resurrection and ascension, supposing them to have taken place, admitted of public and ocular demonstration, like that of the ascension of a balloon, or the sun at noon-day, to all Jerusalem at least. A thing which every body is required to

† P. 17.

‡ John iii. 14. viii. 28. x. 11, 15, 17, 18.

§ John xiii.

|| John xviii. 4---9.

¶ Ver. 11.

believe

believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal; and as the public visibility of this last related act was the only evidence that could give sanction to the former part, the whole of it falls to the ground, because that evidence was never given†.”

Supposing for a moment, that God were pleased to make a divine revelation of his will to mortals, or to require our assent to a series of historical facts, it is certainly very becoming for such creatures as we are to dictate, *à priori*, the kind and degree of evidence on which we chuse to believe them! Admitting, however, that Jesus Christ had arose and ascended in the sight of all Jerusalem, let us see what better evidence would this have afforded us of the fact. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem are long since dead; that they did see it therefore, we could not possibly have any other evidence than that of a few historians of those ages, and these historians would lay open to the same cavils and objections as the evangelical writers. Mr. P. would still tell us that it rested upon the credit of eight or nine, (perhaps not so many) witnesses who say they saw it, and that the rest of the inhabitants saw it, whence “all the rest of the world are called upon to believe it.” And if he could meet with but one unbelieving *Thomas*, who being absent

† Age of Reas. p. 6.

from Jerusalem, happened not to see it, he would add, "Thomas did not believe the resurrection; and as they say, would not believe, without having ocular and manual demonstration himself. *So neither will I*; and the reason is equally as good for me, and for every other person, as for Thomas." So that the objection to the small number of witnesses of this event is reduced to a mere cavil, for if "ocular and manual demonstration" be *necessary*, then *no* historic evidence can be sufficient.

And that it would not be thought so, is evident from a comparison with other parallel facts. For instance, the supernatural darkness and earthquake which accompanied the crucifixion must have been witnessed by, not only all Jerusalem, but all the inhabitants of Judea at least †; and yet I dare aver Mr. P. and my infidel readers believe as little of this as they do of the resurrection. So true is the assertion of Jesus Christ, that, if men "hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one (even) arose from the dead ‡."

The witnesses of the resurrection, however, were more than Mr. P. is willing to admit. Besides Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalen and several other women, "he was seen of Cephas, [i. e. Peter] then of the twelve; after that he was

† Matt. xxvii. 45, 51---54.

‡ Luke xvi. 31.

seen

seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present time, [i. e. about A.D. 56.] but the rest are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all, says St. Paul, was seen of me also *.”—These are “the small number of persons, not more than eight or nine” who witnessed the resurrection!

But we are told “the best surviving evidence we now have respecting this affair is the Jews. They are regularly descended from the people who lived in the times this resurrection and ascension is said to have happened, and they say, *it is not true* †.” They are also regularly descended from the people before whom Moses and the prophets wrought their miracles, and they say that they *are true*:—from the people of whom we read so many extraordinary histories, which they also aver to be *true*:—from the people “to whom were committed the oracles of God,” and they assert that these likewise *are true*; in all these things however it seems they deserve no credit, because their testimony is in favour of Revelation:—but when they witness against christianity, and say the resurrection is *not true*, then their’s is the “best evidence we now have.” But why? hear the Reason of the Age!

* 1 Cor. xv. 5—9.

† Age of Reason, p. 6.

“ Jesus

“ Jesus Christ (says he) preached most excellent morality, and the equality of man; but he preached also against the corruptions and avarice of the Jewish priests, and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of priesthood. The accusation which these priests brought against him, was that of sedition and conspiracy against the Roman government, to which the Jews were then subject and tributary; between the two [the Jews and Romans] this virtuous reformer and revolutionist lost his life *.” That is, in short, the reason why the Jews in this case, and in this only, deserve credit, is because their fathers hated and murdered Jesus Christ, in the most cruel and unjust manner!!! This I must confess, to borrow Mr.P.’s expression, “ for absurdity and extravagance is not to be exceeded by any thing” I ever met with.

As to the apparent variations among the evangelists, they are by no means important, or unaccountable. Several persons at different times, and for different purposes, visited the sepulchre and found things in different situations. This is perfectly natural and consistent, and might be demonstrated if we had room to be minute: at present I can only refer the inquisitive reader to the

masterly treatises of Gilbert West, Esq. and Mr. Ditton, observing that neither of them were clergymen, or wrote for interest.

“ All the other parts of the New Testament except the book of enigmas, called the Revelations, are a collection of letters under the name of epistles; and the forgery of letters has been such a common practice in the world, that the probability is, at least, equal, whether they are genuine or forged *.” The same may be said of other epistles, those of Pliny and Cicero for instance, as of those of the New Testament. A pretty method this of getting rid of historic evidence! and which may be applied with equal propriety to every other species of records, as to the epistles. Histories, lives, and poetic compositions have all been forged under the most respectable names, therefore none of them are to be depended on, and in the next century it may become a query whether Thomas Paine himself ever existed. Such is the tendency of infidel principles; and some writers would, I believe, sooner reduce the whole history of former ages to a mere blank, than admit the truth and authority of the sacred writings.

To the book of *Revelation* Mr. P. would not perhaps have so strongly objected had he been

* Age of Reas. p. 19.

aware that it predicted the French Revolution *; at least it is certain that *Jurieu* in France †, and *Fleming* in England ‡, to name no more, foretold such an event at the very period in which it happened: however, the best evidence to the divine authority of this book, is to be found in the last volume of Bishop *Newton's* Dissertations on the prophecies.

III. We now come in the last place to consider what Mr. P. calls “the three principal means that have been employed in all ages, and perhaps in all countries, to impose upon mankind. Those three means are, *Mystery*, *Miracle*, and *Prophecy*. The two first (he adds) are incompatible with true religion, and the third ought always to be suspected ||.”

I. “With respect to MYSTERY, every thing we behold, is, in one sense, a mystery to us. Our own existence is a mystery: the whole vegetable world is a mystery. We cannot account how it is that an acorn, when put into the ground, is made to develope itself, and become an oak. We know not how it is that the seed we sow unfolds and multiplies itself, and returns to us such an abundant interest for so small a capital.

* Rev. xi. 13.

† The Fulfillment of Scrip. Proph.

‡ Rise and Fall of Popery.

|| Age of Reas. p. 47.

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“ The fact however, as distinct from the operating cause, is not a mystery, because we see it; and we know also the means we are to use, which is no other than putting the seed into the ground. We know therefore, as much as is necessary for us to know; and that part of the operation that we do not know, and which, if we did, we could not perform, the Creator takes upon himself and performs it for us. We are therefore better off than if we had been let into the secret, and left to do it for ourselves *.”

In these observations I have the happiness perfectly to agree with Mr. P. and thank him much for so ably answering his own objections. Let us apply this reasoning to the mysteries of natural and revealed religion. The *existence* of *God* is a mystery. “ The fact, however, as distinct from” the manner of it, “ is not a mystery, because we see” the fullest evidence of it in every thing around us. “ We know therefore as much as is necessary for us to know” in order to dictate the duties we owe to our Creator.

Again, the doctrine of divine *omnipresence* is itself a mystery. “ The fact, however, as distinct from the mode “ is not a mystery, because” Reason strongly indicates it must be so, and Revelation positively asserts it.

* Ib. p. 47, 48.

Lastly, the doctrine of a *Trinity*—that is, that “there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one*”—is a mystery, not that the *fact* itself is so, because it is revealed, but the *manner* in which the three are one, or the one is three, is still a mystery, for it is not known, and perhaps never will be. But we “know as much as is necessary for us to know,” and have therefore no business to push our enquiries farther.

“But (says our Philosopher) the word mystery cannot be applied to *moral truth* ;” that is, if I understand the proposition, there is no mystery in our moral duties, because they are all obvious, or revealed. This is granted; but the following inferences have no relation to these premises.

“The God in whom we believe is a God of moral truth, and not a God of mystery. . . . Religion, therefore, being the belief of a God, and the practice of moral truth, cannot have any connexion with mystery. The belief of a God, so far from having any thing of mystery in it, is of all beliefs the most easy, because it arises to us, as is before observed, out of necessity. And the practice of moral truth, or in other words, a practical imitation of the moral goodness of God

is no other than our acting towards each other, as he acts benignly towards all."—Here are several mistakes of considerable importance. If by "the belief of a God," Mr. P. intends only a believing that there is a God, this indeed is not mysterious, but then it is a very small part of religion: the worst men in the world generally admit this. If he means to include a belief of the divine perfections, as omnipresence, omniscience, &c. these subjects are full of mystery, as already observed. But the most striking defect in Mr. P.'s religion, is, that it admits no kind of religious worship, private or social: for he comprehends the whole in faith and morals. What then is the boasted religion of nature reduced to this? Are no grateful acknowledgments to be made to our bountiful benefactor? No prayer to be offered for his blessings, favours, or protection? Alas! it should seem not: for in another part of his work Mr. P. condemns and ridicules everything which bears the appearance of piety or devotion. "Humility" he stiles "ingratitude;—Prayer is, with him, a presumptuous "attempt to make the Almighty change his mind *."—O Socrates! O Plato! by what indignant name wouldst thou have called this religion?

* Age of Reason. p. 21.

But the mysteries of Redemption are, it seems, peculiarly offensive to our author, as they have ever been to the proud children of human science. The following passage is indeed shocking to a serious mind, but the quotation may afford some useful reflections. "From the time (says our author) I was capable of conceiving an idea, and acting upon it by reflection, I either doubted the truth of the christian system, or thought it to be a strange affair; I scarcely knew which it was: but I well remember, when about seven or eight years of age, hearing a sermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee of the church, upon the subject of what is called *Redemption by the Death of the Son of God*. After the sermon was ended, I went into the garden, and as I was going down the garden steps (for I perfectly recollect the spot) I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard, and thought to myself that it was making God Almighty act like a passionate man that killed his son, when he could not revenge himself any other way; and as I was sure a man would be hanged that did such a thing, I could not see for what purpose they preached such sermons *."

From this passage, I cannot help remarking,

* Age of Reas. p. 38.

and

and it is a remark of some consequence, that what are called the doctrines of Redemption and Grace appear very evidently to deistical writers to be the doctrines of the Bible, though some nominal christians cannot find them there. And it appears from Mr. P. and other writers of the same principles that this is their grand reason for rejecting them. So it was in the first propagation of christianity. The preaching of the cross was "to the Jews, a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, foolishness:" but blessed be God, it is to "them that believe," of every nation, "the wisdom and the power of God †."

It may be possible to represent the evidences of christianity with such strength and perspicuity as to force conviction upon the mind of an objector, or at least silence him: yet unless the heart of man be truly humbled under a sense of guilt, and he is brought to see his need of such a Saviour as the gospel exhibits, he will never truly receive him: for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither indeed can he, for they are spiritually discerned ‡."

I shall conclude this article with noticing a misrepresentation of the christian doctrine, for which I want a proper epithet. "The christian

† 1 Cor. i. 18—24.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

mythology

mythology (says Mr. P.) has five deities: there is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, the God *Providence* and the Goddess *Nature*." O shame on common sense and candour! not only to misrepresent the doctrine of the Trinity, but to make christians worshippers of the Goddess *Nature*! to say nothing of the absurdity of making a God of Providence.

The two following articles, having been partly considered already, shall be touched with all possible brevity.

2. MIRACLES in every point of view appear to Mr. P. both "improbable" and "unnecessary." He raises this question, whether, "is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie?" and determines it "at least millions to one, that the reporter tells a lie." This may be true enough, for ought I know, of some men; but there is a great difference in characters; and the madness of this way of reasoning is evident by applying it to another case. Mr. P. mentions the power of electricity—suppose he was to tell an illiterate countryman that, by an electrical machine he could extract flashes of fire from the human body, and that without giving any painful sensations, might not the clown reply, "millions of lies have I heard told,

told, but such a thing I never saw ; it is therefore millions to one that you tell a lie?"

But to bring the question to a closer issue. It is allowed on all hands that Jesus Christ did pretend to work miracles.—Mr. P. says Jesus Christ was “ a virtuous and an amiable man ”—that “ the morality he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind †.”—“ He preached most excellent morality, and the equality of man,” and was, it is said, “ a virtuous reformer and revolutionist ‡,” which I suppose is the highest term of panegyric in Mr. P.’s vocabulary.---Now, if miracles are all tricks of *legerdemain*, as he represents them §, how can he reconcile the conduct of Jesus Christ with his own character of him? Is it not, in his own words degrading “ a virtuous reformer ” to represent him as “ a shew-man playing tricks to amuse and make the people stare and wonder ||?” If Jesus only imposed on vulgar credulity, he must be an impostor, and consequently not “ virtuous and amiable :” If he was “ virtuous and amiable ” he was not an impostor, but really wrought the miracles he pretended to.

3. And lastly, we must add another word respecting *prophecies*. Mr. P. here adverts to what

† Age of Reas. p. 5.

§ Ib. p. 49.

‡ Ib. p. 7.

|| Ib. p. 51.

he had already said respecting the change of import in the meaning of the word *prophet*. We have already examined the text he *made* to prove this, but one of his arguments escaped us. It is this that the prophets are distinguished into "greater and lesser," now, as he supposes, there cannot be degrees of inspiration, the term must refer to poetry; i. e. they were major and minor poets. To the confusion of this argument however the term, which is not scriptural was only intended to distinguish the larger books from the the smaller, as I should suppose almost every child must know.

To get rid of the evidence of prophecy, he resolves it into wild guess and conjecture, which I can compare to nothing so properly as to Epicurus's wild notion that all the beautiful creation we behold originated from an accidental confluence of atoms.

I cannot here pursue the subject minutely, but for the satisfaction of such readers as wish to examine for themselves, I shall only point out three remarkable prophecies with their accomplishment, and then with a short anecdote leave the reader to his own reflections.

Jeremiah l. and li. compared with Dan. v.

If. lii. 13, to the end of liii. compared with Matt. xxvii. xxviii.

Matt.

Matt. xxiv. compared with Josephus's History of the Destruction of Jerusalem.

The whole of these, with many more, may be found beautifully illustrated and explained in Bishop Newton on the Prophecies, and Lowth upon Isaiah. I shall conclude this subject with an anecdote referring to the second of these passages.

The witty and profligate character of *Wilmot*, earl of Rochester is but too well known from his works. Few men ever exceeded him in debauchery, yet it pleased God to honour his own grace in the conversion of this chief of sinners, during his last illness; and then those scriptures, which had before so often been the subject of his sport and ridicule, became the only ground of his hope and comfort. The above fifty-third chapter of Isaiah in particular greatly excited his admiration and devotion. He had it repeatedly read to him, and descanted much upon it, as beautifully fulfilled in the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer.

I have now gone through what was proposed. There are many other things in Mr. P. which merit severe animadversion; but my limits oblige me to forbear. I shall therefore take leave of the reader, with observing from the close of the pamphlet before us, the sum total of all the discoveries of modern philosophy in religion—namely,
that

that by reducing all religion to one simple article, the belief of a God, it cuts off every improvement in divine knowledge from the days of Adam—throws us back into the darkest ages of heathenism—levels us, in this respect, with the most illiterate barbarians --and all the comfort it leaves a good man, as to futurity is, that “the Power that gave us existence IS ABLE to continue it.”—To such writers I would take up Job’s parable, and say---“Miserable comforters are ye all, and physicians of no value.”

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THE END

